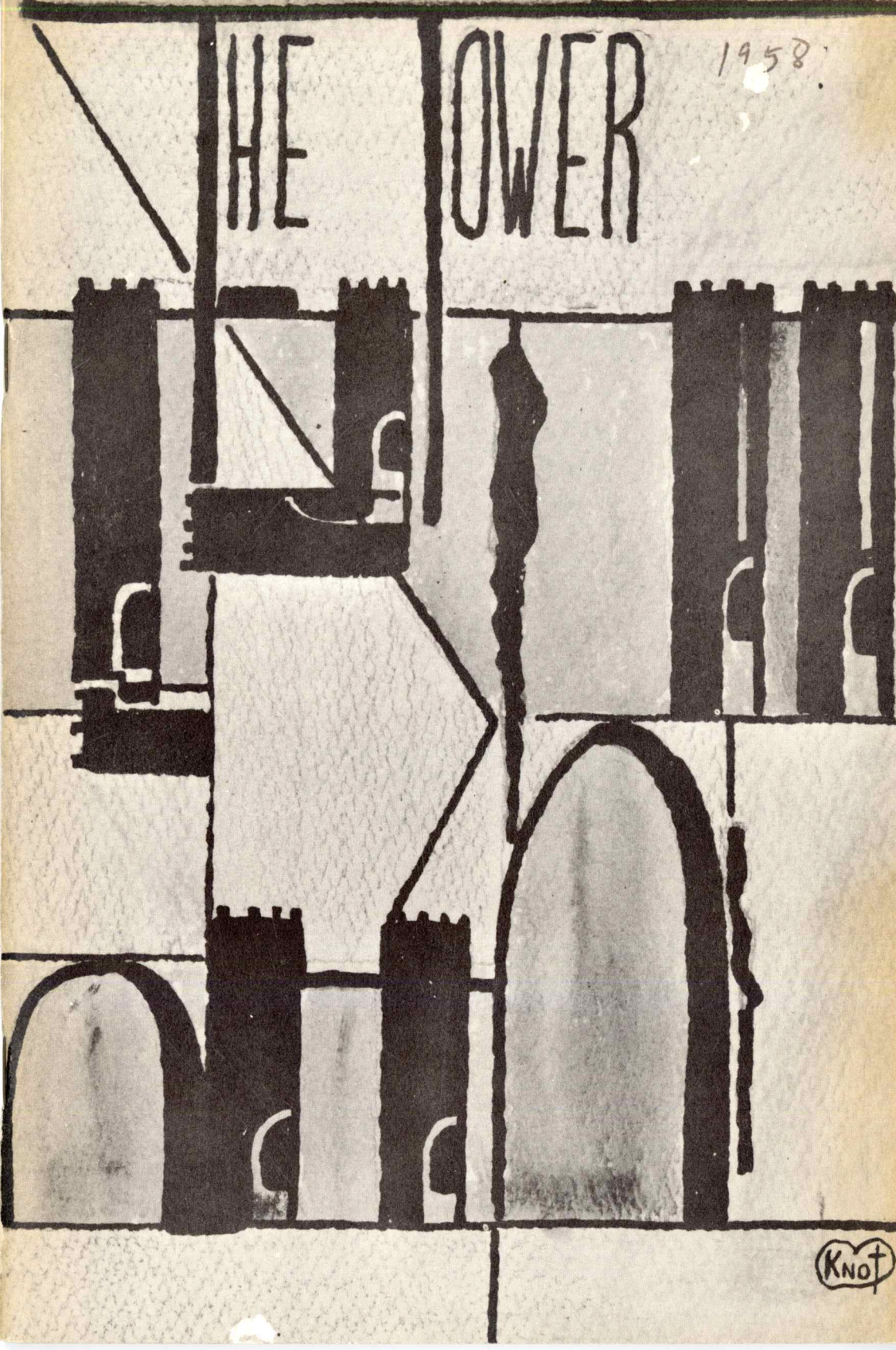
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The Tower

Editor:	Jann Sabine
Associate Editors:	Mary Charles Jackson Martha Jo Anton
Story Editor:	Margaret Peake
Make-up Editor:	Pat Perreault
Business Manager:	Terry Langford
Art Editors:	Marge Lane Bob Murray Knot O'Neil
Cover Design:	Knot O'Neil
Typists:	Frances Pittard Joanne Mink

In appreciation of their cooperation and help, we dedicate The 1958 Tower to the Publications Board.

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Down to Mis'ry

By Milly Slater

The land surrounding dry-creek was black, flat land stretching outward over miles of green countryside until a gradual rise produced the hill that the small southern town, Dayton, was located upon. For years, the creek had dissected the valley, caressed the warm black topsoil, while secretly, evasively, it tore and slashed its way deeper into the dark richness producing craters and deep seams within the earth where limestone grinned with dark seamed lips and gray quicksand sucked at the unsuspecting, until bleached bones marked the gray stretches for the traveler.

But the inundating creek was the enigma to the inhabitants of the nearby countryside. It was along these gray banks that old Sam Radford lost his life while only his horse and the silent murmuring creek knew the identity of the murderers. The horse and the silent waters were aware, hours before the townspeople were to discover the body, that the five thousand dollars in gold-pieces had vanished from the old man's saddlebags . . . These golden coins had vanished forever from the dark secretive land.

This creek trickled, murmured, and laughingly concealed its mysteries while it rushed onward rejoicing at the wayfarer's ignorance.

And this deep black soil reaching outward from the gray banks promised richness within its warm depths. For generations it had beckoned the planter

to caress its soft black grains; its warm velvety particles challenged him to cultivate the illusive richness. Thus he forced the cotton plant to grow and to produce and to wave over miles of dark mounded rows; and then, deprived of its fruit, the barren plants withered, leaving dry brown cracking stalks upon which the land chuckles its mysteries in the parched September breezes.

This land, this creek, possessed strange, beckoning powers and there were those men who were unable to ignore the challenge. There were those who came, struggled, and failed, for the strange warm blackness concealed the secret of fetid erosion within its bowels.

Several miles beyond this silent waiting land, Dayton rests beneath the shade of oaks and its churches and houses beckoning, welcoming the traveler with the appearance of calmness and peace.

It is summer and the villagers pause until the shadows lengthen and the land cools before the carriages venture forth to seep their wheels in the white sand of the thoroughfares.

On this particular afternoon, the polished carriages and the sleek groomed horses of the better families --- as those with chests of gold or with long family lineages called themselves --- rolled from before the front gates of white-columned homes or from in front the picket fences of white bungalows seated amid towering cedars or among spreading japonicas. Through the afternoon heat and dust the procession progressed until it halted before the wide gate of the Alexander

house. A narrow brick walk led from the wisteria-entwined gate to the shaded veranda of the large white house. The mahogany doors were opened wide to receive the guests but the window shutters were closed, erecting a wall to resist the summer heat. Gold-leaf mirrors reflected batiste lace blouses, whispering skirts and high black patent shoes as the ladies, the honored guests, moved from the brightness into the delicious shaded coolness of the house.

On this day, Mrs. Alexander was having a tea in honor of the family's recent acquisition, the King plantation. But this was unknown to the arrivals, for Lisa Alexander would select the correct moment, and then, dwarf her audience with the magnificence of her proclamation. Lisa Alexander had a particular method for accomplishing anything that she desired. And she fully utilized her abilities whenever the deserving moment arose.

So through the wisteria-bound gate and into the shaded drawing room the visitors passed and each nodded a greeting to the small stately woman who stood just within the wide frame doors. She welcomed the guests as they glided past her. She spoke, smiled, but remained aloof. Her hands were folded before her, the diamond rings, designed to be admired, glittered at the visitors, and the woman's dark eyes narrowed as she appraised each garment that flowed before her. The tiny woman performed her duties superbly, but with none was she intimate, with none would the term friend be used, for this was Lisa Alexander.

The guests entered through the wide doorway, paused nodded.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Alexander."

"'Afternoon, Mrs. Bailey."

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Alexander."

"'Afternoon, Mrs. Eves."

"Good afternoon, Lisa."

"'Afternoon, Mrs. Powell."

And then they were seated in the drawing room which afforded a peculiar purple shade created by the heavy wine draperies which hung from ceiling to floor before the great windows. Lisa Alexander moved into this dimness.

"I hope that everyone is served?"

"Yes, thank you, Lisa," said Mrs. Powell, and the matron paused as if to add something to the reply, but for the moment, the opportunity was lost.

"The salad is delicious, Mrs. Alexander. So nice of you to plan this occasion."

"Well, it was not exactly planned in an ordinary fashion," ventured Lisa Alexander. She appeared to be searching for the precise words, for the exact moment. The diamonds smiled at the group and the purple dimness glowed unrelieved.

"Oh, come now, Lisa," interrupted Mattie Powell impatiently, "I'm certain that we are all aware of the momentous occasion that brings us here." A brief flicker of disdain dwelled in her eyes as she regarded her hostess and the purple shade. Lisa Alexander acknowledged the affront. Almost imperceivably she nodded toward Mattie Powell as she accepted the challenge.

"Ladies," Lisa began. The haughtiness of the proud characterized every feature

of her body. "Ladies, today the Alexanders purchased the King plantation. Today, we have become the largest landowners in the entire country, for now we own five plantations. Yes, dears, five of the country's finest cotton plantations bear the Alexander name. . ."

She was unable to supress the distinct tone of contempt within her voice. And this contempt developed such proportions that it filled the deep shaded room and whispered to each listener. The purple shade became oppressive and among the guests a general movement of uneasiness rippled through the room. Silence reigned over the scene.

Unable to end the discourse nor desiring to end the flow of glorious thoughts and words, Lisa expounded upon the limitless boundaries of the Alexander dominion. No simple rebuff could stem the flood of haughtiness; no simple interruption could diminish the Alexander greatness nor the effigy of the great southern cotton barons, nor the aristocracy of her lineage that now gripped the woman's mind.

So intense was her preoccupation, nor had it been lesser, Lisa Alexander was unable to conceive that within the purple shade was one who failed to admire her wealth, her position, or the Alexander holdings. There was one amidst the purple shadows who momentarily remembered with distinct clarity the morning that the distinguished Drummond Alexander (husband to Lisa Alexander) drove a rickety wagon pulled by two thin scarred mules through the main street of Dayton.

With repulsion she heard again the wagon wheels creaking in tune to the faint shuffle of bare feet as the negro woman and her four tattered children trudged behind the wagon. The wheels groaned in the deep sand, while the negress pleaded for her children's welfare, for the few pieces of furniture and the worn quilts that lay crumpled upon the wagon-bed. The pleading voice and gestures went unheeded, for this was a tenant whose crop had failed. This woman was an Alexander tenant, and for her, there was no patience, not even with death; there was no excuse for crop failure, nor failure to plant and reap; therefore, the course had been inevitable --- confiscation and eviction.

And this was the great Drummond Alexander.

The remembrance faded while the ugliness of it seethed within Mattie Powell, leaving a bitter, sour taste surging within the woman as she once more became aware of the voice whose dissertation was now repetitive and whose tones again emphasized that which was most glorious.

"We are now the largest landowners in the entire county."

Abruptly, the soliloquy was ended.

"Lisa Alexander, someday you'll rue those very words," warned Mattie Powell.

"And how is that, Mrs. Powell?" laughed the hostess with a pretentiousness that discredited the interruption.

"Lisa, you know that the owners of the King plantation have met with nothing but tragedy these many years. And now you boast of owning that very land. Well, from the first cotton plant that was made to grow in that soil it has been a hard-luck proposition. Go ahead, Lisa, and

smile at what I'm saying, but it's common knowledge in these parts that Ernest King went mad. And he owned all of the dry-creek bottom land. Just as you do now. Before him, there was Sam Radford. Sam was found in his own creek, shot through the head, and the cotton-money reaped from that same land was gone. . . . stolen."

"No, Lisa, I would not boast if I possessed that plantation, for it has brought nothing but misery to its owners."

Silence prevailed as Mattie Powell finished speaking. And they waited for Lisa Alexander's retort. It followed, quick, harsh, and disdainful.

"Thank you, Mrs. Powell." She turned, nodded. "Good afternoon, ladies."

And the guests moved quickly from the depths of the purple shade across the wide veranda, through the wisteria gate to the waiting carriages.

They turned away from the Alexander house. Away from the haughtiness and naked contempt. They walked from out of the wisteria-entwined gate to sit beneath the shade of white columns, broad oaks, and pungent cedars, to wait for what the future promised the Alexander greatness. They waited amidst the heavy perfume of japonica blossoms, and, in time, their patience was rewarded.

Two years they waited. Two whole years they abided patiently, and then they witnessed the tottering of the great from the precarious throne of greatness. They applauded as the contemptuous were brought low. But even they who had waited pained to observe the Alexander stables empty, the carriage traces vacant, the great house dispossessed of the glitter

(the gold-leaf furniture and mirrors were gone now; the purple shade was replaced with the white glare of naked day), the great halls of the house resounded hollow and empty, the dark corridors shouted with emptiness, dust lingered in dim recesses, and the wisteria gate hung ajar on rusted hinges, for the Alexanders were distraught. The land, their dominions, lay brown and barren supporting dry withered stalks that rustled and groaned in their nakedness. The Drummond Alexanders were penniless, for the land lay in brown desolation. . . . the boll weevil had come to the South.

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A Prayer

By Ginger Flowers

Prayer of mine for yesterday, tomorrow, be:
"Self, harbor no vice within the soul
of thee."

But midst the moment's muddy corruption
Tears boil out another prayer:

"Muddy feet, firmly walk;
Sickened heart, hear God talk;
Crippling conscience, cripple not;
Honesty mine, permit no blot;
Own and only, faithful be;
Peace of mind, befriend thou me."

Midst the moment's muddy corruption
Old-new courage grapples dare:

"Honor costly, be preserved;
Unwelcome guest, be reserved;
Price so dear, be fully paid;
Wisdom's foundation, be thou laid;
Smugly smiling face, be shamed;
Self--and only self- be blamed."

Supplicatus

By Martie Norman

Who am I?
How can I tell you?
For I do not know.

I am the wind
Hurling myself thru space;
I am the smallest twig
Bending until I fear I shall break.
I am the sun
Sending warmth to all who need me;
I am the cloud
Rushing forward to block the sun's warmth
From all who need it.

I am joy
Imparting myself to all;
I am sadness
Shadowing all whom I meet.
I am love
Lifting all men above themselves;
I am hate
Casting all men into blackness.

Who am I?
Surely God told me to be someone
The same as you.

But if He told me
I was afraid to listen.

An Editorial

By Barbara Goldstein

The major criticism of college students today is their apparent indifference to the world around them. At least this is the criticism so often preferred by teachers, parents and others of the "older generation."

Are you as a college student willing to accept such a definition of mediocrity for yourself? Are you ready to stand up for what you believe, are you sure enough of your ideas to broadcast them to the world and Sputnik, if you so desire?

America was founded for the purpose of giving individuals the right to hear controversy, to gather from it facts, and then to formulate ideas. Maybe it is the older generation today who refuses to be realistic, who has tended to conform and accept ideas handed to it because of fear of society and what society will say.

It is obvious now, that Americans must not be afraid to have opinions and to fight for them. An article in the SOCIAL WORK JOURNAL, July, 1952 reads, "Obviously, there will always and should always be some who will disagree (about policy). That's as much a part of democracy in an agency as it is in a nation. But it's equally a part of democracy for them to be able to say so. If given that opportunity, it seems more than likely that they will bow to the will of the majority, and perhaps before long carry the banner with equal enthusiasm."

Don't you as an educated person go away from this college afraid to stand

firm in your beliefs. Regardless of fear of social pressure, loss of job and reputation, say what you think. That's one of the principles on which our nation was founded -- freedom of speech.

We are ever mindful of the fight others have in attempting to gain this freedom. We are greatly sympathetic now with the Polish students who bravely revolt, risk life and limb, for freedom. At the same time we must be conscious that our own rights are not granted us indefinitely. We must desire them and guard them carefully.

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Comprennant, Je Demandu

By Ginger Flowers

How long I asked these small favors
And knew it not:
Will you quietly rebuild smashed saints
Though I be walking on the fragments?
Will you give your last and most,
Anxious you've no more to give?
Will you faithfully stand twixt me and thee:
When thee might grieve my heart?
Will you throw sticks of charity on the friendly fire
While I pour water?
Will you never mention my black blindness
Though it crashes me into priceless loves?
Now I ask all over:
(Knowing what I ask)
"Will you (once more) call yourself my friend?"

"She ran into his arms, hugging him wildly"

Lost

By Sandra Ward

I

It was a small square white house perched on a hill which sloped gently to the dirt road. Painted on a weather-beaten mailbox at the end of the lane leading to the house was the name "Jake Nabry." The front porch was made from rough rocks cemented together, and a rock wall surrounded the yard. There were flower pots on the porch, and in the yard zinnias and sweet peas and marigolds bloomed. A little piece from the house was a big hedge tree with a wooden swing handing from one branch. Behind the house was a chicken yard and off to the side a barn and vegetable garden. The whole place showed the constant effort of some-one who had worked to make it home. A warm light issued from the back of the house, and a dog stood at the door waiting for supper. Inside a little girl of about five was playing paper dolls on the kitchen floor. A man sat by the stove reading the evening paper. He was dressed in an old fashioned brown wool suit, black button-lace shoes and a gold watch chain hung from his pocket. His complexion was swarthy, and his red hair was slightly greyed. A woman dressed in a shapeless blue dress with her brown hair pulled back in a knot at the nape of her neck was cleaning the table. Her head was held high and she sang in a tremulous, grating voice, "Shall We Gather at the River." Putting a load of dishes down by the sink, she stopped and stared at a little brown stain.

She turned and addressed the man, "Jake Nabry, how many times have I told you not to spit snuff in this sink? It seems like you don't care if this house looks like a pig pen. Spittin' in the sink after I've told you and told you!" There was a loaded silence, and then the explosion.

"By God, woman, I'll spit where I damn well please!" the man roared throwing down the paper. He stamped from the room, accidentally brushing against the child, and the heel of his black shoe tore one of her paper dolls. She stared after him wonderingly for a moment then burst into tears. The woman went to the child and gathered her in her arms.

"There now, Dorothy, baby, don't cry. Grandmother's here." Dorothy clung to her tightly, but she did not understand what had happened.

II

The cement floor of the back porch was cold to Dorothy's touch, and on this fourth of July it felt good. She stretched out her legs from her pink sunsuit and let them absorb the coolness. A rippling laugh escaped from her for the small wiggling object she held in her arms was licking her ear and biting at one of the pigtails Grandmother had so carefully plaited that morning. Dorothy felt completely happy on this day because Aunt Jane had brought her a puppy of her very own saying that now she was nine years old and could take care of an animal without any help. As if this wern't enough, Grandaddy would come home from work soon, and he was bringing fusees for her to celebrate the fourth of July with. They would set them off in the back yard and sit watching until it

got dark. Dorothy held the little soft brown animal tightly against her, glorying in the feel of his warm baby body against hers. Seeing her grandmother coming from the garden with a basket of butter beans, she put the dog down and ran to meet her.

"Isn't he beautiful?" she exclaimed eagerly.

"Well," the woman replied, removing her sunbonnet and wiping a trickle of sweat from her face, "he is a right purty little feller. Puts me in mind of the dog your Great Uncle Henry had before he died."

"Oh, I didn't know he had a dog. Tell me about it," the child begged for she loved what she called "before-you-was-born stories."

"Well," the woman began, "crippled as my brother Henry was, he loved that old brown dog and it followed around after him all the time. He raised it from a puppy, and I never seen a man set such a store by a dumb critter." She settled herself in the chair on the back porch, spread a newspaper over her lap and began to shell the beans she had picked.

"Well, what ever happened to it?" Dorothy prompted, sitting down at her feet.

"What happened to it?" the woman's voice became distant. She drew her mouth up tight and her blue eyes glinted hard as steel. "I'll tell you what happened. One night Henry went into town and he tied that little old brown dog up to keep it from following after him. Well, like always when Henry left, that old dog began to howl. He was eating supper. He never had liked that dog, I reckon maybe because it riled him so that Henry was livin' with us in th' first place." Dorothy frowned. She knew

when her grandmother said "he" in that tone of voice she meant her grandfather, and Dorothy felt a familiar knot of confusion gathering in the pit of her stomach. The low voice continued.

"He said, 'I've put up with enough from that damn Henry and his dog, and I don't aim to listen to that howling while I'm eating my supper,' " The woman's voice took on an intensity of hatred and Dorothy knew her grandmother was no longer aware of her presence. "He went outside, picked up a stick and just beat that old dog to death. I couldn't do a thing but stand there and listen to that old dog holler, but I'll never to my dying day forget the look on Henry's face when he came home."

Somehow to Dorothy the coolness of the porch no longer seemed as delicious as before, and part of the light was gone from the day. After a while she saw her grandfather coming up the path.

"Here's the fusees, honey," he said. "Do you want to light 'em now?"

"No," she muttered, picking up her puppy and cringing a little at the man's touch on her shoulder. "I don't feel much like it today. Let's save them for another day." She turned rapidly and ran around the house, but not quite quickly enough to miss the look of hurt astonishment in the man's grey eyes.

III

The November day was not very cold, but just nippy enough to give a spicy feeling to the air. Several children were scampering down the road returning from school. Their game of tag was interrupted as one of

the group, a slender girl with brown pigtails and wearing a red-checked dress, turned in on the lane leading to a white house on the hill.

"Good-bye, Dorothy," the children called.

"Good-bye," she replied and hurried up the hill. She could not tarry today; today was her birthday and she was twelve years old. Grandmother would have baked a cake, and there would be presents from Aunt Jane and everyone. She quickened her pace at the thought, bounding up the front steps and throwing open the door. She stopped still in the doorway, however, and stared wide-eyed, for there in her living room in polished mahogany with white keys gleaming was the most beautiful piano she had ever seen. She uttered a cry of wonder and delight tinged with disbelief. After a moment she noticed her grandfather standing in the shadows beside the piano.

"Well, how do you like it?" his gruff voice interrupted her thoughts.

"Oh, golly!" she exclaimed, "What a birthday present!" She ran into his arms, hugging him wildly.

The big feather bed was warm and inviting, but Dorothy could not sleep. Not on this night, not on her twelfth birthnight when she had received the treasure of all treasures. She stole out of bed and started toward the living room to inspect the piano once more when voices in the kitchen arrested her attention.

"I didn't know you wuz gettin' the piano, Jake."

"Well, didn't you want her to have it, woman?"

"Of course, I did, but what is it you're always sneakin' around gettin' things for her without lettin' me have a part in it? You're trying to take her away from me just like you've taken everything else."

"Damn it, woman, you're lying---"

The angry voices continued shattering the silence of the little house, but Dorothy heard no more. She dashed out the front door into the yard throwing herself into the swing under the old hedge tree. She stared at the sky, trying wildly to count the stars or think what the moon might be like up close, but it wasn't any use.

"I didn't know you were buying the piano. ---Well, damn it woman--- You're trying to take her away from me ---Well, damn it woman" rang in her ears, pounded in her brain, and though she was unaware of the chill of the night, she sat shivering in the wooden swing.

IV

Dorothy sat silent on the steps of the small white house and watched the moon rear its head over the hill across the road. Part of it was still hidden by the trees atop the hill, and it twinkled through the foliage as if promising it would soon leave this obscuring mound of earth and make its solitary journey across the heavens.

The moonlight shimmered on the girl's light brown hair and seemed to soften the lines of slim, sunburned body revealing in it the promising curves of womanhood. She leaned against one of the large white

flower pots which lined each step, and a green fern frond moved against her cheek, stirred by the warm summer breeze. In sudden irritation, the girl's fingers closed on the frond, breaking it off near the root. "Grandmother's fern," she thought and threw it down. She had wanted to go with the gang to Jo's Place but Grandmother had said no. She could hear the woman's scolding voice now, "I don't like you running around with that bunch of wild hoodlums, especially that Tom Jenkins, and I've heard of the unchristian dancing they do at Jo's." Dorothy had said she didn't see anything so unchristian about be-bop and Tom Jenkins wasn't a hoodlum at all, and Grandmother had cried and Dorothy had left the table coming out on the steps.

Stretching her bare foot in the warm dirt below the step she thought, "Maybe I don't blame Grandmother for not liking the way I've acted this summer, always going with the gang trying to have fun with Granddaddy so sick in the hospital and all." Dorothy felt a pang of guilt. "But maybe I don't like the way she's acted either," she retorted. "Especially letting Aunt Jane take Granddaddy to her house when he got out of the hospital. Why couldn't she bring him home. It might be our last chance to be with him," but Dorothy didn't suppose Grandmother cared about that. Ever since she could remember it had been the same. She had often dreamed of a reconciliation between her grandparents, but she now realized this was only wishful thinking. It seemed that the hatred between the two was fathomless. They seldom exchanged a civil word, and they could

quarrel violently over the simplest details of everyday life. Jake was a diabetic and his wife had tried faithfully, but in vain, to force him to remain on a proper diet. Some of the most intense battles Dorothy had witnessed had been over whether or not Jake should eat dessert. He would rant and rave and curse and her grandmother would withdraw into a dignified silence or sing "Jesus Saves." Neither ever gave in. Neither ever apologized even though Dorothy was certain they often regretted things said in anger. With each outburst of temper the gap between seemed to widen until in the last years, Dorothy thought their lives had narrowed into a pitched battle, and the only purpose of each in living was to spite the other. Dorothy loved both deeply and wanted to think that she had remained neutral, but in truth she realized her grandmother's influence had been strongest. Jake Nabry was such a solitary man. Except for his occasional outburst of uncontrollable temper, he was a quiet person who had difficulty in communicating his ideas to others. Dorothy felt that she had never quite been able to break the barrier between herself and her grandfather.

Now he lay on Aunt Jane's hospital bed never saying a word, his grey eyes staring blankly and (Dorothy thought) accusingly. They said he was dying. He was dying, and all summer Dorothy had gone with Tom Jenkins and the gang and danced at Jo's Place all to avoid facing those accusing grey eyes. Dorothy sighed deeply.

The screen door squeaked, and Dorothy turned to see Grandmother standing behind

her. The gaunt woman sank down beside the girl on the step. "Dottie," she said softly, "It was your Aunt Jane who called. Dottie, it's come. What we wuz expectin'. Your granddaddy passed away a while ago. Died in his sleep and me not there or nothing," her voice was low and musing. The girl stared hard at the broken fern leaf for what seemed an eternity, then burst into tears. The woman gathered her in her arms.

"There now, Dorothy, baby, don't cry, Grandmother's here." Dorothy clung to her tightly, but she still could not understand.

"It's too late," the girl sobbed, "I've lost him."

"No, honey," the woman replied, "I was the one that lost him and it happened a long, long time ago."

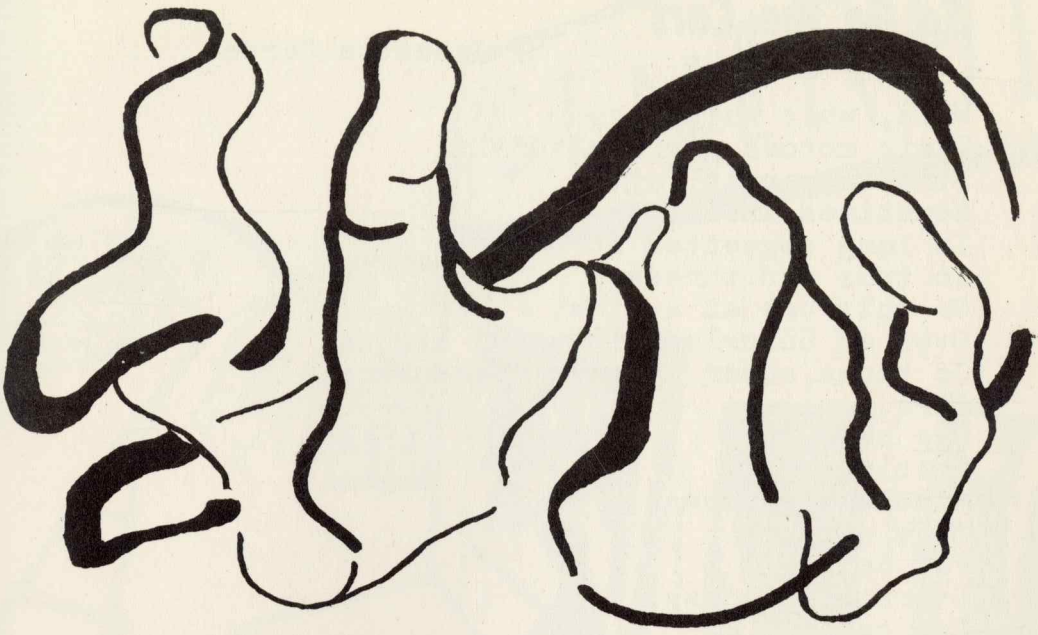
The moon had left the hill across the road. Now it stood over the hedge tree and was shining on the little white house where two women sat weeping on the steps.

****

Plea

By Jann Sabine

Tread softly the halls of sanity, ye who can.
Move quietly along the paths of precious
proportion
--For there are those who don't
And more who won't--
Disdain the jibes at ones who fall;
Covet not pride, who can be proud.
--Have no vanity
In your sanity--
The space in which you move is e'er so small.



The Unpredictable

By Jennette Carden

We laugh,
We sing,
We dance,
We probe the mysteries of the universe.
We joke,
We cry,
We smile at it all.
We make war over frivolous issues.
We scorn,
We mock,
We praise,
We give way to the unsuspectable.
In a sense
We truly are
A peculiar lot and--the unpredictable.

So Go the Cars

By Jennette Carden

Whiz, whiz whizzing,
Their motors purring softly;
Sometimes rattling,
Sometimes knocking;
In long segmented streams,
In twos and threes,
Or only one at a time;
Over an unfurled ribbon of highway
Go those super dynamic mechanisms--
Cars.
Big cars,
Little cars,
Middle-size ones;
Slim cars,
Fat cars,
Overstuffed ones;
New cars
Old cars,
Long and short ones;
But that's not all,
There are
Rich ones--long, sleek luxurious;
Poor ones--small, shabby, efficient;
Wealthy ones--with luxuries but not
too many.

Cars are colorful--
In a way;
Cars are monstrous--
In a way;
But somehow they're to be marvelled,
To be looked upon
As outstanding facets of man's ability;
As amazing, yet wonderful
Developments
Of the highest order of intelligence,
Of minds not yet fully developed--
Namely, those of the species Homo Sapiens.

GENERAL

An Ounce of Pride

By James Brantley

With the exception of the barber shop, the post office and the railway depot, the town of Black Creek was owned by the mine company, and only a few industrious housewives expended energy and money to paper the calciumized walls or plant flowers in the hard-packed clay yards that were forever threatened by a fringe of weeds. The dirty, yellow company houses of the town were strewn over the hills that give it life as a hand full of peas might be scattered upon a floor. The grey slate dump with its little car that trundled to the top in an endless trip reared its monumental shape above this milieu and added to its drabness and harshness.

Black Creek, the source of the town's name, and the railroad wound, like endless serpents, from diverse directions through the hills and crossed in the heart of the town. During the heat of the summer the creek shrank to a mere trickle in a bed of black silt, and the heat from the railroad track rose and shimmered and danced. Hot tar oozed forth from the cracks in its sleepers and occasionally stuck to the soles of the man's shoes that stepped upon them. Now and then he stepped between on the slag, and it growled and rattled to his step. From his eyes he watched the track, but he would frequently glance to the left side of his chest, smiling shyly to himself as he watched the erratic swing of a highly polished medal on a colorful ribbon attached to his clean, faded shirt that was spotted with patters of sweat.

On the cement block that ran in front of the company commissary, Howard Killingsly, its manager, half-dozed against the door-facing on an inverted Coca Cola bottle crate that seemed to bend under his bulky shape. Falter, his friend from the barber shop, stood in the door way absent mindedly rubbing the reddish stubble on his chin. Killingsly's snooze and Falter's silence had arisen from the slow death of their sick conversation.

Falter's eyes, that had been averted to the tin-shaded concrete from the glaring brightness of the drab world of wilting weeds, spidery-legged houses and the railroad tracks, once again looked upon it. He squinted. Far down the tracks he saw Martin, but he didn't recognize him until a sudden half-glint played from the shining medal on his chest as he turned from the tracks between a weed-walled path toward him. Then he knew, then he chuckled.

Falter reached down and touched the shoulder of the dozing Killingsly, who awakened with a half-snort.

"Here comes old Martin," Falter informed him.

Instantly, Killingsly stood, grinning and blinking his eyes. "Damned if it ain't," he said, his voice displaying a wide-awake quality, "and he's got that medal on too!"

"I'll bet anything he don't know the real value of that medal," Falter said as he leaned back against the wall.

"Naw, he don't know--he sure struts with it though, just like a gobbler in matin' season--sears it everywhere he goes, keeps it shined like new money. You ain't suppose to shine medals, least that's what I've always heard--my boy told me and he ought to know, him being a corporal and all."

Falter nodded in agreement as Martin came into the edge of the shade where the medal lost its reflective glint and hung stilled to his chest.

"Pertty hot, pertty hot out there, this shade feels real good," he exclaimed.

Killingsly looked at Falter and winked, then at Martin replying, "Yep, don't you think it's liable to melt that medal? Liable to melt in all this heat seems to me."

Martin looked down at the medal. "Reckon not, pure gold don't melt too easy I hear."

Killingsly and Falter suppressed their urge to laugh but exchanged knowing nods.

Falter spoke after his eyes had carefully examined the medal. "Seems to me you ought not to be wearin't that thing around here in plain sight, somebody's liable to take a hankerin' to it and steal it right off."

A surprised look shadowed Martin's face but it faded as he spoke. "Now nobody," he answered almost indignantly, "would want to take this medal. It's real purty, but it ain't gonna do 'em no good, it wern't their boy what earned it."

"Supposin' they wanted the gold though Martin," Killingsly said, with a voice filled with feigned seriousness, "I bet you ain't never thought of that."

Martin cocked his head to one side and scratched an itching spot on the back of his neck. "No, I reckon' I ain't."

"Now you'd better," Killingsly warned, "Or your liable to lose it."

Martin's face wore a frown as he passed between the two men into the commissary; a frown that was almost quizzical in its lines.

Falter winded at Killingsly as he followed Martin, then he stood waiting by the door for Martin to leave.

Martin came, finally, with a brown paper bag cradled comfortably in the crook of his right arm.

"Better get you some medal cleaner, Martin," Falter advised, his voice disguising his inner merriment at his own joke, "you want to keep that thing clean and sparklin'."

"I keep it right good with plain old wash soap," Martin replied, "Shines real good I think."

"Don't look as good as medals cleaned with real Army Medal Cleaner, specially made for medals like that," Killingsly volunteered as he came out, "and I could special order you some--looks like that boy of yours would have told you about the special polish when he give you the medal, Martin."

Martin pondered this new idea for a minute, then he looked down at the medal and fingered it gingerly with his free hand; he looked back into their penetrating gazes. "I reckon he clean forgot to tell me 'bout it."

Falter, assuming a judicious air, spoke with a voice tinged with loftiness. "Well, you'd better do as we've been tellin' you, Martin. I know you'd hate to stop wearin' that medal and all that, but you sure would hate for somedoby to come along and steal it from you."

Martin nodded in agreement, but his face still harbored a worried frown. "I'm gonna think on that business Mr. Falter, I sure am, you may be right."

He turned and started away from them shaking his head from side to side in a perplexed manner. As soon as he was once

again on the railway embankment Killingsly and Falter loosened their long-confined laughter.

"That fool," Killingsly said between outbursts, "he really thinks he's got something valuable there in that medal. I hear he's about to wear his woman and his clothes out keepin' 'em clean to wear with it."

Falter still chuckled as he replied. "You'd better put in an order for some Army Medal Cleaner, Howard, that is if he don't put that thing in a can and hide it under his house to keep somebody from stealin' it.

Killingsly looked after Martin's disappearing figure and nodded his head, "He's liable to do that; that fool's just liable to."

Death was not a stranger to the people of Black Creek. Here, his hand was fast, and they feared him with the appalling fear of those that must live in his constant company. They heard his piercing wail in the repeated blasts of the siren as he rejoiced in claiming another victim. They saw his fact etched on the faces of the dead and dying men truntled to the top in the mind cars, and they saw his handiwork in their crushed and mangled bodies.

Killingsly and Falter stood in the doorway of the commissary, both had expressed their need to be about their affairs, but neither seemed willing to culminate the conversation. Falter, in a last ditch effort to prolong it looked out to the sky on the horizon of the rearing hills and commented, "Sure could stand a little rain."

"Yeah, sure could," Killingsly agreed, "we ain't had a real wet one since last year when old Martin was buried."

"That's about the last good one--didn't think they was gonna hold his funeral it rained so much," Falter said with conviction.

Both of them stood silent, until Falter began once again. "That medal sure got bent up, didn't it?"

"Pertty bent up," Killingsly answered almost reverently, "pertty bent up--I looked at it in the casket. He was sure proud of that thing--not really worth much--never would take it off. Funny thing, somebody getting so enthused over something like that, but Martin was pertty simple. He thought that thing was a Purple Heart or a Congressional Medal of Honor, even thought it was gold--why Good Conduct Medals ain't even gold, they'r made out of bronze, leas that's what I've always heard, my boy told me--him being a PFC, he ought to know."

He stopped suddenly, then after a moment's reflection continued. "Something else that's real funny around this town. People's been buying wallpaper around this place faster than I can order it--why some of these folks are gettin' plum pickey. Why use to they'd take any kind I happened to have, now they want to see the sample book."

Falter, his voice sounding an inner wonder added, "Yeah I know, my wife wants me to paint the shop, and she's always on me about clean jackets, tellin' me I ought to shave more often because I'm the barber--seems to me some kinda fever's out."

Killingsly turned, half reluctantly and started into the store, "Might be," he answered with a voice that almost questioned.

McGinnis

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